

[By Brent Curtis](#)

Rep. Peter Welch said he first heard complaints about ethanol additives to gasoline and the \$6 billion subsidies that support them from small-business owners in Vermont.

But he told a small gathering of those same constituents Thursday that he learned firsthand about the corrosive effects of ethyl alcohol from his chainsaw.

"I know all about how it destroys equipment. It rotted the fuel line in my chainsaw over the winter," the congressman said, addressing a small group that gathered on the dock of the Woodard Marina on Lake Bomoseen.

Welch said he worked this spring as one of a number of Democratic and Republican lawmakers who passed an amendment in the House seeking to repeal an ethanol subsidy — which adds up to 45 cents per gallon of gas. The amendment lost traction in the Senate, but Welch said he's hopeful the subsidy will eventually be repealed.

"Our ethanol policy makes no sense," he said. "It's a failure."

Added to gasoline as part of a federal mandate to help gasoline burn more completely in combustible engines, ethanol has done more harm than good and at a cost that's too high, Welch and his supporters said.

"We only run engines for half of the year and during the winter is when it does the most damage," said Barbara Woodard, standing on her company's dock Thursday. "We used to have a lot of families come here but the cost of repairs has caused people to give up."

Kerry Fowler, who owns a landscaping company in Castleton, held up a corroded fuel line that

he told Welch was one among the many that he's replaced due to ethanol in fuel.

"It's basically a solvent," he said. "It eats right through."

John McDonough, owner of a service station in Brandon, told Welch the environmental benefits that the additive was supposed to carry were undercut by a reduction in mileage.

Welch agreed.

"It's one thing to try something and fail with a policy but it's another thing to keep going long after it's failed," he said.

Welch blamed presidential politics for the continued existence of the subsidy — which includes a 54 cent per gallon import tariff.

"The first question every candidate gets asked when they go to Iowa is do they support the ethanol subsidy," Welch said of the grain producing state that's the first stop on the campaign trail for presidential hopefuls. "Candidates are afraid to say 'no' when they're campaigning there."